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AUTHOR Watson, Arden K.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Exploring the relationship of communication apprehension (CA) to culture, age, and gender, a study examined 368 United States mainland children (186 males and 182 females, ages 5-11, in a public elementary school in Bowling Green, Kentucky) and 373 Puerto Rican children (172 males and 201 females from public elementary schools in the Gurabo school district). CA was measured using the Personal Report of Communication Fear (PRCF). For the Puerto Rican respondents, the inventory was translated into Spanish. Results showed that culture and age interacted significantly, with both younger Puerto Rican subjects and older Puerto Rican subjects reporting higher levels of CA than did younger United States mainland subjects. Findings also revealed that CA in Puerto Rico lessened with age, indicating that CA levels may vary in different cultures, and that culture can be a factor in determining whether CA increases or decreases with age. (Three tables of data are included.) (MM)

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Communication Apprehension in Puerto Rican and U. S. Mainland Children

Arden K. Watson
Assistant Professor of Speech Communication
The Pennsylvania State University
Delaware County Campus
Media, PA 19063

Lula S. Munro
Professor of Teacher Education
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, KY 42101

Joan M. Fayer
Associate Professor of Speech Communication
University of Puerto Rico
Rio Padras, Puerto Rico 00931

Marie L. Aloise
Caguas Department of Public Instruction
Gurabo, Puerto Rico 00931

Running Head: COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship of communication apprehension (CA) to culture, age, and gender among Puerto Rican and U.S. mainland children. Culture and age were found to interact significantly, with Puerto Rican younger subjects and Puerto Rican older subjects reporting higher levels of CA than did U.S. mainland younger subjects.

DESCRIPTORS: communication apprehension, stage fright, shyness, children, culture, PRCE

Communication Apprehension in Puerto Rican and U. S. Mainland Children

Berlo (1960) noted the importance of intercultural research when he cited cultural restraints as barriers to communication. In Language and Culture in Society, Hymes (1964) furthered this interest in the study of the relationship of culture to communication. Research by Albert (1964) and Kochman (1972) gave impetus to the study of culture and communication with their analyses of communication in African and American ethnic cultures. A communication barrier identified within many cultures is communication apprehension (CA). This fear of oral communication with another person or persons is found to affect many individuals negatively by inhibiting amounts of communication and interfering with effectiveness in life experiences (McCroskey, 1977).

Studies which examine CA across cultures suggest differences in amounts of CA which may be attributed to cultural norms. Other factors which appear to relate to CA include age and, at least in some studies, gender. For purposes of understanding and preventing CA, researchers are interested in exploring factors that contribute to its development in various cultures. This study of communication apprehension in Puerto Rican and U. S. mainland children explores the relationship of CA to culture, age, and gender by comparing levels of apprehension among

subjects from the two cultures.

Culture, Communication, and Apprehension

Culture and Communication

Condon and Yousef (1977) theorize that culture cannot be separated from communication, especially in view of the differences and relationships among cultural values. Specific facets of culture influence communication patterns. These patterns within a culture are described by Fayer (1988), who explores the people and history of Puerto Rico, media uses, religious rhetoric, contrasts in language use, nonverbal communication, and intercultural interactions. The communication norms of a culture also govern communication actions of participants. Nine-Curt (1976) compares the U. S. task-oriented societal cultural values with the Carribbean Hispanic family-oriented societal values and concludes that Anglo and Puerto Rican cultures are almost in total reversal with one another: acceptable and permissable communication norms in one are practically always not so in the other.

The cultural norms of child-rearing practices and classroom expectations impact patterns of communication as well (Nine-Curt, 1976). Learning patterns also appear to be affected by cultural differences. Fayer, Gorham, and McCroskey (1983) explored the effect of teacher immediacy upon learning in the U.S. mainland and Puerto Rican cultures. The study found teachers' use of nonverbal and verbal immediacy behaviors, those that enhance closeness with another person, to be related to cognitive and affective learning in both groups, with the degree to which

immediacy affected behaviors to be far greater for the mainland students.

Communication Apprehension

Defined as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78), communication apprehension is also labeled stage fright, reticence, or shyness. Elementary and secondary school students, approximately 20 % of college populations, adults, and older persons are found to be affected by this problem (McCroskey & Richmond, 1979; Moore, 1972). Significant numbers of children have been found to be affected by CA (McCroskey, Andersen, Richmond, & Wheeless, 1981); and stage fright (Wheeless, 1967). Garrison and Garrison (1979) found significant amounts of CA in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade children. In Lazarus' research (1982), 40 % of fifth grade subjects labeled themselves shy. Increase in apprehension during elementary grades has been documented in other research studies (McCroskey, Andersen, Richmond, & Wheeless, 1981; Shaw, 1967). Moreover, McCroskey et al. (1981) found negative effects among CA in children and teacher perception in the elementary classroom environment.

Etiology of Communication Apprehension

Both heredity and environment are found to be sources of trait-like phenomena such as communication apprehension (McCroskey & Richmond, 1985). Evidence of the effects of heredity on communication patterns suggested from studies comparing identical twins indicate a trait of "sociability" which determines the attitudes people form toward contact with others.

Although heredity may contribute significantly to the development of communication apprehension, environmental influences may have an even greater effect. Daly and Friedrich (1981) found three factors which may affect the development of communication apprehension in early years: reinforcement, modeling, and oral communication skill acquisition. The home and school environments appear to be the primary arenas where these factors may contribute to the development of communication skills and CA.

Culture and Communication Apprehension

Characteristics of a culture may also contribute to communication apprehension. Family socioeconomic status (Elliott, 1968), rural background (Grutzek, 1970), and highly ethnic home or community environments (Phillips & Butt, 1966) appear to contribute to dissonance with language use among children.

Studies comparing communication apprehension across cultures reveal interesting patterns. Levels of communication apprehension reported in native languages by American and Swedish children were analyzed as to the effects of culture, age, and gender (Watson, Monroe, & Atterstrom, 1985). Overall, Swedish subjects, ages 5- to 12-years, reported more communication apprehension than did American subjects, with 9- to 12-year-olds in the Swedish culture being more apprehensive than were 5- to 8 year-old subjects in the American population.

Pacific Basin studies conducted at the University of Hawaii measured levels of CA of students in the subjects' native languages (Klopf, 1984). Apprehension levels varied significantly

among the seven cultures, with Japanese students reporting most and Korean students the least apprehension.

A study of the CA experienced by Japanese students when speaking Japanese and English found that Japanese students had high CA not only when they spoke English, but also when they spoke Japanese (McCroskey, Gudykunst, & Nishida-Ninon, 1985). Asian and European groups in the U. S. reported levels of CA in their native language similar to U. S. norms; Latin American and Middle Eastern subjects reported levels of CA significantly below U. S. norms (Allen & Andriate, 1983). Another study of students in the U.S. whose native languages were Vietnamese, Spanish, Cambodian, Chinese, and other languages, found that formal English as a Second Language training had no relationship to CA (McCann, Hecht, & Ribeau, 1986).

McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond (1985) found smaller proportions of Puerto Rican students in Puerto Rico to be highly apprehensive about communication in their first language, Spanish, than were U.S. mainland students; however, the Puerto Ricans were much more apprehensive about communicating in English (McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond, 1985). Apprehension in the first language was a better predictor of apprehension in the second language than was self-perceived competence in the second language.

Since individuals in various cultures experience different amounts of CA, it is interesting to speculate as to whether or not apprehension in a language is related to specific practices in that culture. Habits and communication patterns of the U.S. mainland and Puerto Rican cultures have been found to vary in many ways; this paper examines further the communication patterns

in these cultures by examining levels of CA among Puerto Rican and U.S. mainland children.

Method

The U.S. mainland subjects were 186 males and 182 females, ages 5-11, in a public elementary school in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Sampling was done on availability basis from classes designated as student teaching practice classes. The Puerto Rican respondents were children in public elementary schools in the Aguadilla school district. Sampling was done on the basis of availability in regular elementary classrooms. The total number of Puerto Rican subjects was 373, 172 males and 201 females.

The instrument used to measure levels of CA was the Personal Report of Communication Fear (PRCF) developed by McCroskey et al. (1981). This 14-item self-report inventory is designed to be used with children in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Respondents to the PRCF are instructed to indicate the degree to which each of 14 items applies by indicating 'YES' -- strongly agree; 'yes' -- agree; '?' -- unsure; 'no' -- disagree; or 'NO' -- strongly disagree. The scale is read to subjects below the seventh grade.

For U.S. mainland 5- to 8-year-old subjects, the classroom teacher administered the English version of the PRCF in groups of four to seven students. After reading the directions and discussing possible responses with a small group, the teacher administered the PRCF individually by reading each item and recording the student's response. For 9- to 11-year-old subjects, the classroom teacher distributed the inventories to the entire class and discussed the directions. Then the teacher

read the items to the class and paused after each item for subjects to circle their responses.

For the Puerto Rican respondents the inventory was translated into Spanish and spatially arranged in the same manner as the English version. A translation process of English to Spanish and back into English was used. In addition, the Spanish version was reviewed by several English/Spanish bilinguals for overall comprehensibility and accuracy. The Puerto Rican teachers followed the same procedures as the U.S. mainland teachers for administering the inventories.

Results

Scores on the PRCF were grouped for analysis according to the culture, gender, and age of the subjects. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 1.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

A 2 (Culture: U. S. mainland vs. Puerto Rican) x 2 (Age: 5- to 8-year-olds vs. 9- to 11-year-olds) x 2 (Gender: male vs. female) analysis of variance for unbalanced designs (SAS Institute, 1985) indicated a significant main effect for culture, $p < .001$. Puerto Rican subjects reported a higher level of communication apprehension ($M = 34.82$, $SD = 7.65$) than did U. S. mainland subjects ($M = 32.46$, $SD = 8.30$). No significant main effect for age or gender was found. A significant 2-way interaction, Culture x Age, $p < .05$, was found. No additional 2-way interactions and no 3-way interactions were determined to be significant. (See Table 2 for results of the analysis of variance.)

(Insert Table 2 about here)

Tukey post hoc analysis (Kirk, 1968) was employed, using the harmonic mean to balance cell sizes. The following significant mean differences were indicated, $p < .05$: Puerto Rican younger subjects (M = 35.94, SD = 7.90) and Puerto Rican older subjects (M = 34.82, SD = 7.31) reported higher levels of communication apprehension than did U. S. mainland younger subjects (n = 31.34, SD = 8.08).

Discussion

In this and other studies it has been found that culture is a factor which can influence CA. In the current study, although the mean scores for each group did not reflect high levels of CA according to ranges established by McCroskey et al. (1981), Puerto Rican children were found to be more apprehensive than were U.S. mainland younger children when they speak their native language. The explanation of the difference of the levels of communication apprehension reported by Puerto Rican and U.S. mainland children should be sought within the cultures of the two countries.

In order to gain additional insight into the aspects of Puerto Rican culture that may explain some of these differences, the elementary school teachers who administered the PRCE were asked to describe the language patterns of elementary children of this study in their primary environments -- the home, the community, and the school. These descriptions were then contrasted to the discourse patterns of Puerto Rican adults. Well-behaved Puerto Rican children have limited conversations with adults, and children's opinions are not highly valued.

However, children's conversations with other children are very lively. The younger the child, the greater the respect for authority. At the age of 7 or 8 some of this reserve lessens, and the child becomes more vocal with adults. For adults in Puerto Rico, talking is valued and rewarded. Silence is to be filled with talk, music, singing, or a combination of these. As children mature, they assume adult conversation discourse patterns.

The Puerto Rican elementary classroom is very strict, with few opportunities for discussion. Most of the talk is teacher to student. This pattern changes through high school and college. Although students are expected to be respectful to their teachers, they are given more opportunities to express opinions and discuss and exchange ideas.

Not only do discourse patterns change, but also the levels of CA experienced by students in Puerto Rico as shown by the study of CA among Puerto Rican university students (McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond, 1985). This change in levels of CA is illustrated by Table 3 which reports the percentage of Puerto Rican subjects by age level experiencing low, moderate, and high CA.

(Insert Table 3 about here)

There is a significant difference between the numbers of combined 5- to-8-year-old and 9-to-11-year-old subjects and college-age subjects with high and low CA in the Puerto Rican sample (χ^2 = 8.49; df=1; $p < .005$). The percentage of students with low CA in Puerto Rico increases from elementary school to college when students speak their native language, Spanish.

The home and the school are environments in the Puerto Rican culture which may contribute to causes of the decrease in CA among the subjects described in this study. The discourse norms in the Puerto Rican culture which regulate not only the amount and type of talk, but who speaks to whom, how often, at what age, etc., may provide more of the answer. The home and school may merely reinforce the discourse patterns of a culture.

Conclusions

While there have been studies of CA in adults in various cultures, there has been little research regarding CA in children in different cultures. The study reported here not only provides data for children in a Spanish-speaking culture, but makes possible the comparison of results with a previous study of young adults in the same culture. CA in Puerto Rico appears to lessen with age. Findings of this study indicate that CA levels may vary in different cultures, and that culture can also be a factor in determining whether CA increases or decreases with age. It cannot be assumed that communication apprehension is developmental, i.e., children become more apprehensive as they mature. Discourse norms in each culture govern the talk of people of different age groups. School and home are two aspects of culture which reflect and reinforce these norms and can contribute to increased CA in some cultures and decreased CA in others.

Although the home and school as factors influencing CA in elementary school children were discussed above, extensive qualitative and quantitative data are needed to determine the

effects of these factors. More research is also required with different age groups in various cultures. A study of one age group in a culture may not necessarily represent the CA of other age groups. Since all cultures are composed of people of various ages, it is important that different age groups be included in the study of communication patterns. Studies which reflect differences in these age groups will make true cross-cultural comparisons possible.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of PRCF Scores for Cultures by Age Group and Gender

	Culture					
	U.S. Mainland			Puerto Rican		
Age group/gender	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
	5- to 8-year-olds					
Males	100	31.16	8.61	59	36.29	7.36
Females	95	31.66	7.45	65	35.63	8.41
Total	195	31.34	8.08	124	35.94	7.90
	9- to 11- year-olds					
Males	86	31.73	9.05	113	34.20	7.21
Females	87	34.36	7.48	136	35.33	7.39
Total	173	33.05	8.38	249	34.82	7.31

Note. The greater the score, the greater the amount of CA.

Table 2

Analysis of Variance: PRCF Scores

Source of variation	df	SS	F	p
Total	740	47614.68		
Main effects				
Culture (C)	1	1682.42	27.30	<.001
Age (A)	1	19.22	0.31	n.s.
Gender (G)	1	188.36	3.06	n.s.
2-way interactions				
C x A	1	335.58	5.44	<.05
C x G	1	43.32	0.70	n.s.
A x G	1	167.43	2.72	n.s.
3 way interatctions				
C x A x G	1	1.22	0.02	n.s.
Error	733	45177.13		

Table 3

Percentage of Puerto Rican Subjects at Various CA Levels

	Low CA	Moderate CA	High CA
5- to 8-year-olds	16.9	68.5	14.5
9- to 11-year-olds	19.2	65.0	15.8
College students[a]	27.9	60.3	11.8

The Personal Report of Communication Fear (McCroskey et al., 1981) was used as the measure of CA for 5- to 8-year-olds and 9- to 11-year olds.
The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (McCroskey, 1982) was used as the measure for the college subjects.

[a]These percentages were taken from larger Puerto Rican Sample (Sample 2) (McCroskey, Fayer, Richmond, 1985).